

Not Just One Hermeneutical¹ Criterion; But Three!

Achieving a Coherent View of Genesis that Leaves No Pieces of the Puzzle Out

A Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) Q & A column has issued the following challenge to prospective interpreters of the first chapter of Genesis: “*Unless there is compelling reason **on the basis of the biblical texts themselves**...we are to believe God created the world in six 24-hour days*” (boldface mine).² In direct reply to that dare, I have written both of my extended essays: “*The Biblical Demand to take Another Look: Ten Compelling exegetical Reasons the Creation Days of Genesis are Non 24-Hour*” and “*Defusing the Alleged Conflict Between Scientific Fact and the Text of Genesis 1 Without Compromising Either One,*” as well as my brief study, “*Only the Big Bang Reconciles Genesis 1:1 with the Whole of Genesis 1.*”³ As an LCMS pastor, I take no issue with our Synod’s stance that the text of Genesis is the inerrant and revealed Word of God. My main disagreement instead lies in the refusal of LCMS leadership to make good on the gauntlet that they have laid down by offering a serious hearing to those who seek to answer the challenge they set forth.⁴ Nevertheless, it must also be stated that legitimate biblical interpretation entails two **additional** aspects, **all three** of which must triangulate with each other.

While proper exegesis is clearly a *necessary* aspect of biblical interpretation, it is not a *sufficient* factor in elucidating the first chapter of Genesis. For the very reason that Genesis ch. 1 entails both a description of the physical phenomena of nature and the giving of an accounting of the cause of its existence (Gen. 1:1), it should be expected that it will in *some way*⁵ harmonize both aspects of this larger reality (Psalm 19:1-2). It is true that certain Christians reject this expectation of reconciliation on the grounds that, since Genesis 1 is the Word of God, its message should be believed without reservation. Nevertheless, this objection can’t withstand even biblical scrutiny for the reason that it conflicts with St. Paul’s declaration in Rom. 1:18-20 that the witness of nature (“*the things that have been made*”) is also truthful testimony. Indeed Paul goes so far as to name nature as a vehicle through which God’s “*eternal power and deity*” is made plain to all people. Consequently Christians have no permission to ignore scientific data as it pertains to geological processes, just to protect their *interpretation* of Gen. 1.

Entirely consistent with the previous point, interpreters of Gen. 1 must thirdly heed the abstract principle of rationality. One “first-principle” of logic, known as the *law of non-contradiction*, states that in order for any assertion (e.g. Scripture) about a set of phenomena to be true, it must harmonize with the actual facts of the case. On this principle, it is illogical for young-earth creationists to insist that the sun and moon were created on Day 4 when, not only science, but even the *biblical* text teaches otherwise.⁶ Jesus affirmed this same principle with respect to both natural phenomena (John 3:12) and public events that entail miracles and healings that He frequently performed (e.g. John ch. 9 and John 14:11b). I have further addressed the role that apologetics plays across Scripture in three additional essays.⁷ Indeed, insofar as we limit our hermeneutical criteria to only one or even two aspects, we are failing to interpret Scripture *scripturally*!

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¹ The term, referring to the disciplined exercise of interpretation, is derived from the Greek messenger god, Hermes.

² www.lcms.hughes-stl.com/pages/internal.asp?NavID=2210.

³ Access these documents at my website: www.christianityontheoffense.com

⁴ “*The Biblical Demand,*” Ibid, n. 6. As of the time of my writing of that essay, the circumstances I here describe have not improved.

⁵ I am not suggesting that the Bible conveys truth in *scientific* terms. See my essay, “*Defusing the Alleged Conflict.*” Op.cit. (2).

⁶ See both of my papers, “*Truth is Never Less than One,*” and ** “*The Big Bang Alone Harmonizes...*” Op.cit. (2).

⁷ “*How Did the Early Church Grow?*” ** “*The Pervasive Employment of Apologetics and the Use of Reason in the Bible,*” ** “*Hoax? Myth? Or Literally True?*” and ** “*Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions on Apologetics and the Use of Reason.*” Op.cit. (2).